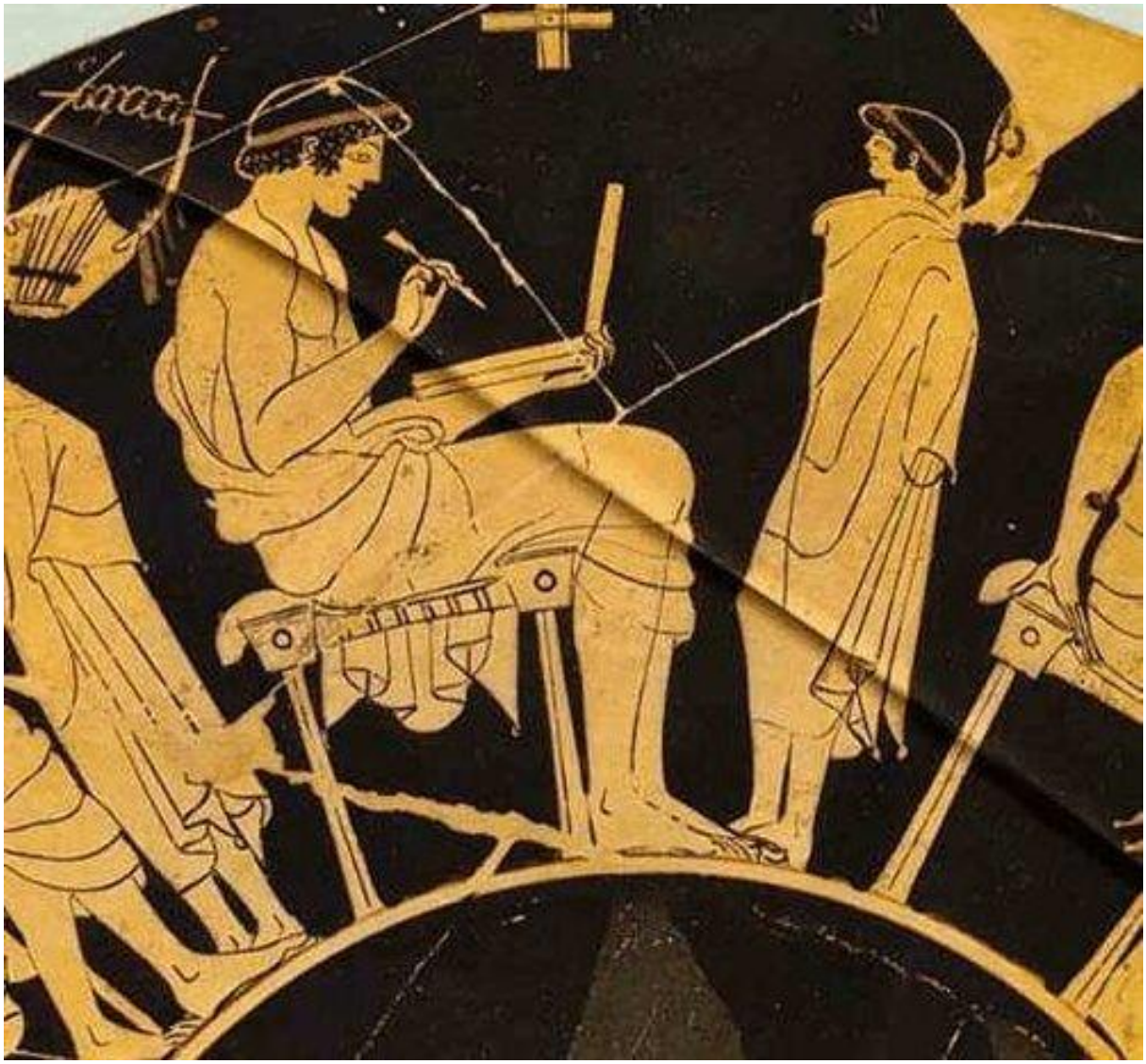
MENO



PLATO

MENO

ΜΕΝΩΝ

PLATO

ΠΛΑΤΩΝ

Translated by Cathal Woods

2011-2022

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Introduction and Brief Bibliography

Meno (Μένων MEN-ohn) is one of Plato's most provocative and fascinating dialogues. It begins in a way familiar from many other short Platonic works. Meno, a young man from Thessaly, asks the elderly Socrates how virtue is acquired. Socrates insists that the more basic 'What is it?' (τί ἐστι;) question about virtue must be addressed first. Meno, overconfidently, gives various examples, requiring Socrates to clarify, by means of the examples of shape and color, that he wants a definition, of what all types of virtue have in common, rather than a list. Meno eventually offers a definition of virtue and Socrates interrogates it, removing half of it and driving the other half into a circularity. Meno is numbed and he likens Socrates to an electric ray.

Where the Socrates of other dialogues is happy enough to part from his interlocutors after doing them the favor of showing them that they do not know what they might have thought themselves to know, the Socrates of *Meno* is willing to proffer some of his own opinions. Indeed, the dialogue turns to this very question, of how to proceed towards knowledge. When Socrates attempts to continue, Meno distracts him with a dilemma: how can they search for something they have no knowledge of? Either it is known and no search is required, or it is not known and no search is possible.

In response, Socrates presents a myth, that souls are immortal and have acquired all knowledge, and further, that this knowledge can be recollected by the individual human being. He then demonstrates this by helping a slave to work out how to double the area of a square. The slave arrives at the same point of puzzlement as Meno, but Socrates points out the diagonal, and the problem is solved. Socrates takes this demonstration to be evidence that this knowledge was recollected and not taught, that "The man who does not know, then, concerning what he does not know, has within himself true beliefs about what he doesn't know" (85c), and that the soul is immortal, since the slave was not taught geometry in this life.

The dialogue now changes direction a second time. When Socrates again moves to continue the investigation, Meno says he would rather hear what Socrates has to say

about the original question: How is virtue acquired? Socrates, who has been flirting with Meno throughout, again consents, but only if Meno will permit him to work on the question on the basis of a hypothesis, as mathematicians do. Meno readily agrees that if virtue is knowledge, it is teachable, but whether virtue is knowledge proves difficult to answer. On the one hand, the proper use of any good appears to require the guidance of knowledge, but on the other, if virtue were knowledge, there should be teachers and pupils of virtue, but we do not see any of these.

On the basis of the latter argument, Socrates introduces a distinction between knowledge and true belief, stating that true belief is as good as knowledge when it comes to any individual action, but that knowledge remains fixed while true belief is apt to wander around, like one of Daidalos's moving statues. Recollection, at the end, is said to be a mechanism for making true beliefs into knowledge, though good men of the past and present rely on true belief, acquired by some kind of inspiration.

Each of these topics – the Socratic search for definitions, Socratic cross-examination (*elenchos*) and puzzlement (*aporia*), the doctrine of recollection (as a response to the problem of how we come to know), the immortality of the soul, the prominence of mathematics as a model of knowledge, the method of hypothesis, virtue's relationship to knowledge, the difference between knowledge and true belief – has received considerable attention in the scholarly literature.

There are very many articles on these and other topics Plato's *Meno*, information about which can be found using Google Scholar. Three useful anthologies are

Brown, Malcolm (ed.) (1971) *Plato's* Meno, Bobbs-Merrill

Day, Jane M. (ed.) (1994) *Plato's Meno In Focus*, Routledge

Sesonske, Alexander & Noel Fleming (eds.) (1965) *Plato's* Meno: *Text And Criticism*, Wadsworth

For information about the characters/persons Socrates, Meno and Anutos, see

Nails, Debra (2002) *The People of Plato*, Hackett

For information about the legal, cultural and mathematical background (in addition to commentary on the Greek text), see

Bluck, R. S. (2010 [1961]) *Plato's* Meno, Cambridge University Press

Thompson, E. Seymer (1901) *The* Meno *of Plato*, MacMillan

The following monographs are philosophical commentaries devoted to *Meno*:

Grimm, Laura (1962) *Definition In Plato's* Meno, Oslo University Press

Ionescu, Cristina (2007) *Plato's* Meno: *An Interpretation,* Lexington Books

Klein, Jacob (1965) *A Commentary On Plato's* Meno, University of North Carolina Press

Scott, Dominic (2006) *Plato's* Meno, Cambridge University Press

Weiss, Roslyn (2001) *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's* Meno, Oxford University Press

Notes on the Translation

The translation was made from the Oxford Classical Text of Burnet, 1922 (Platonis Opera Vol. III).

The commentaries of Thompson (*The* Meno *of Plato*, MacMillan, 1901), Bluck (*Plato's* Meno, Cambridge, 2010 [1961]), McKirahan (*Plato's* Meno, Bryn Mawr, 1986) and Sharples (*Plato:* Meno, Aris & Phillips, 1985) were all useful.

Some steps have been taken towards Hellenic rather than Latinate forms for proper names. In particular, names ending in "-us" are ended with "-os" and intermediate vowels have been retained in many cases. Hence, "Anutos" rather than "Anytus". The most familiar names, such as "Socrates" and "Meno" retain their traditional English spelling.

Marginal page numbers (also called "Stephanus" page numbers) are based on the Oxford Text. At least one Stephanus number appears on each page.

A star (*) in the text indicates a note. Notes can be found at the end of the dialogue.

The image on the cover shows a student standing in front of a teacher who is writing with a stylus on a tablet. In *Meno*'s geometrical passage (82b-85b), Socrates likely draws on the ground in the sand or dust. (Image appears to be in the public domain.)

Corrections and comments are appreciated, by e-mail, to cathalwoods at gmail dot com . A revision of the translation will be prepared when a sufficient number of corrections and changes need to be made. I would like to thank Colin McLarty, George Watson, and Patrick Goold for their feedback.

Cathal Woods

Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA. January 2022

[70a] Meno (**M**): Can you tell me, Socrates, is virtue acquired by teaching? Or not by teaching but by training? Or neither by training or learning, but it comes to men naturally or in some other way?

Socrates (**So**): Before now, Meno, Thessalians were famous among the Greeks, admired for their horsemanship and their wealth, but now, it seems, for their wisdom [70b] too, especially the Larisaians, the townsfolk of your friend Aristippos. Gorgias brought this about among you. When he arrived in the city he made the leading men of the Aleuadai, including your lover Aristippos, lovers of his wisdom, along with the other Thessalians. And in particular, he has gotten you into this habit, of answering fearlessly and grandly if anyone asks a question, as befits someone with knowledge, as [70c] indeed he himself does, when he puts himself forward for any Greek who wishes to ask whatever he wants, and refuses no one an answer.

But around here, my friend Meno, the opposite is the norm, as though some [71a] shortage of wisdom had occurred, and wisdom might have migrated from our territory to yours. If you put a question like that to anyone here, there's no one who won't laugh and say, "My friend, you must think me to be one of the fortunate few, to know whether virtue is acquired by teaching or in what way it comes to be. I am so far from knowing whether or not it is teachable that I don't at all know just what virtue itself is."

[71b] And indeed I myself, Meno, am in the same state. I am impoverished along with my townsfolk in this matter and I scold myself for not knowing the first thing about virtue. And when I don't know what some thing is, how can I know what sort of thing it is? Or do you think it is possible, if someone doesn't at all know who Meno is, to know whether he is handsome or wealthy or further, noble, or the opposites of these? Does it seem possible to you?

[71c] **M:** Not to me. But do you truly not know, Socrates, what virtue is? Is this the report we will carry home about you?

So: Not only that, my friend, but further, that I also had not met anyone else who knew, as it seemed to me.

M: What?! Didn't you meet Gorgias when he was here?

So: I did.

M: And you didn't think he knew?

So: I don't really remember, Meno, and so I can't say at the moment how he seemed to me then. Maybe he did know and you know what he said. So, remind me [71d] how he put it, or you yourself speak, if you like, since you presumably have the same view.

M: I do.

So: Well then let's leave him be, since in fact he's not here. But you yourself, divine Meno, what do you say virtue is? Speak and don't deny me, so that I spoke a most fortunate untruth, and you and Gorgias prove knowledgeable, even though I had said I had never met anyone who knew.

[71e] **M:** But it's not hard to say, Socrates. To begin with, if you want the virtue of a man, it's easy. A man's virtue is this: to attend to the affairs of the city effectively and, in the process, to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and make sure that he suffers nothing similar himself. If you're looking for the virtue of a woman, it's not hard to

express. It's to manage her home well, preserving her possessions and being obedient to her husband. And there's a different virtue for children, both male and female, and for an old man, and, if you want, for a free man and, if you so desire, for a slave. And there [72a] are so many other virtues that there's no problem saying what virtue is, since there's a virtue for each occupation and stage of life with respect to each function of each person. And I take the same to hold for vice, Socrates.

So: It seems I've had some great good fortune, Meno, if, when looking for a single virtue, I have discovered in your possession some kind of swarm of virtues. And in [72b] keeping with that image, of swarms, if I asked what the essence of a bee was and you were to say that there are many different kinds, how would you answer me if I asked, "Do you mean that with this respect to *this*, their being bees, that there are many different kinds, different from one another? Or do they differ not at all in this respect, but in some other, such as beauty or size or something else of this sort?" Tell me, how would you answer when asked this?

M: To this I would say that they do not differ at all insofar as they are bees, the one from the other.

[72c] **So:** And if after this I said, "Now tell me this, Meno. *By what* do they not differ but are all alike, what do you say this is?" Presumably you would have something to say to me?

M: I would.

So: The same applies to the virtues, too. Even if there are many different kinds, they all have some one, same, form, on account of which they are virtues, and which, I suppose, a person who is answering another who asked for what virtue actually is to [72d] be made clear would rightly have paid attention to. Or don't you understand what I mean?

M: I think I understand, though I don't yet quite grasp the point of your question as I would like.

So: Does it seem this way to you only concerning virtue, Meno, that there is one for a man, another for a woman, and so on, or is it the same for health and size and strength, too? Do you think there is one health for a man and another for a woman? Or [72e] is it the same form in every case, wherever health might be, whether in a man or anywhere else at all?

M: I think that with health, at least, it's the same in both a man and a woman.

So: And what about size and strength? If a woman really is strong, won't she be strong because of the same in form and because of the same strength? By the words "the same" I mean this: there's no difference, with respect to being strength, whether strength is in a man or in a woman. Or do you think there's any difference?

M: I don't.

[73a] **So:** Will virtue be any different, with respect to being virtue, whether it's in a child or an old man, or in a woman or a man?

M: Somehow, to me, Socrates, this no longer seems to be similar to those other cases.

So: What? Didn't you say that a man's virtue is to organize a city well, and a woman's a house?

M: I did.

So: But is it possible to manage a city or a house or anything at all unless they do so moderately and justly?

M: Of course not.

[73b] **So:** And if they manage justly and moderately, they will manage by means of justice and moderation?

M: Necessarily.

So: So, both of them, if they are going to be good, the woman and the man, need justice and moderation?

M: Apparently.

So: What about a child and an old man? Could they be good if they were immoderate and unjust?

M: Of course not.

So: But moderate and just instead?

M: Yes.

[73c] **So:** Then all people are good in the same way, since they are good by possessing the same things.

M: It seems so.

So: And surely they wouldn't be good in the same way unless they possessed the same virtue.

M: Of course not.

So: Now since they all have the same virtue, try to say and remember, what Gorgias says it is and you along with him.

M: What else than the ability to govern men, if you're looking for a single thing [73d] in all cases?

So: That is indeed what I'm looking for. But is this also the same virtue of a child, Meno, or of a slave, for these to be able to rule the master, and do you think the person who rules would still be a slave?

M: I hardly think so, Socrates.

So: It's not likely, best of men. And further, take a look at this, too: you say it's to be able to rule. Won't we add to that "justly, and not unjustly"?

M: I think so, since justice, Socrates, is a virtue.

[73e] **So:** Virtue, Meno, or *a* virtue?

M: What do you mean by that?

So: The same as about anything else. For example, if you like, roundedness, about which I would say that it is a kind of shape, not simply that it is shape. I wouldn't speak that way about it for this reason, that there are other shapes too.

M: You are speaking correctly, since I too say that not only justice but others as well are virtues.

[74a] **So:** What are they? Tell me, just as I could tell you other shapes, if you asked me to, then you tell me other virtues too.

M: I think bravery is certainly a virtue, and moderation and wisdom and benevolence and a whole lot of others.

So: Again, Meno, the same thing has happened to us – we have discovered many virtues when looking for one – though in a different way than just now. The one, which runs through all of these, we are unable to find.

M: Somehow I'm not able, Socrates, in the way you're looking for, to get hold of [74b] one virtue over all, as in the other cases.

So: That's not surprising. But I am eager, if I can, to push us on, since you understand, I presume, that this point applies to everything. If someone asked you what I said just now, "What is shape, Meno?" and you said that it is roundedness and he said to you what I did, "Is roundedness shape or *a* shape?", you would certainly say that it is a shape.

M: Certainly.

[74c] **So:** And, based on this, that there are other shapes in addition?

M: Yes.

So: And if he went to ask you what kinds, you would tell him?

M: I would.

So: And again, if he asked in the same way what color is, and you told him that it is whiteness, and the questioner followed this up with "Is whiteness color or *a* color?", you would say that it is *a* color, because there happen to be others too?

M: I would.

So: And if he requested that you state other colors, you would tell him others [74d] that are colors just as much as white is?

M: Yes.

So: And then if, in the same way as I pursued the argument, he said "We always arrive at many things. But don't speak to me like that. Instead, since you call all of these by a single name, and you say that none of them is not a shape even though they are opposites of one another, say what it is that applies just as much to roundedness as to [74e] straightness and which you call 'shape' when you say that roundedness is no more a shape than straightness?" Or don't you say this?

M: I do.

So: Well then, when you say this, do you maintain that roundedness is no more rounded than straight, nor straightness straight than rounded?

M: Of course not, Socrates.

So: Rather, you say roundedness is no more a shape than straightness, and the latter no more than the former.

M: That is true.

[75a] **So:** What is it then that this names, "shape"? Try to say. If you say to the one questioning you in this way, either about shape or color, "But I don't understand what you want, sir, or even know what you are saying", he would probably be amazed and say "Don't you understand that I am looking for what is the same in all these cases?" Or would you have nothing to say, Meno, if someone asked you "What is it in roundedness and straightness and the others that you call 'shape', the same in all of them?" Try to say, so that you can also get some practice for the answer about virtue.

[75b] **M:** No, Socrates. You tell me instead.

So: You want me to indulge you?

M: Very much.

So: Will you then be willing to tell me about virtue, too?

M: I will.

So: Then I must be strong; it's worth it.

M: It certainly is.

So: Come, then, let us try to tell you what shape is. See if you will accept that it is the following: to us, shape is the only thing among existing things that always follows color. Is that satisfactory to you, or are looking for something else? I would be happy if [75c] you defined virtue for me in this way.

M: But this is silly, Socrates!

So: What do you mean?

M: That shape, according to your account, is supposed to be what always follows color. Well, then, what if someone were to say that he did not know what color is, but was having difficulties, just as with shape? What do you think your response would have been?

So: The truth, I think. And if the questioner were one of the clever people, fond of arguing and contentious, I would say to him "What was said is mine, but if I speak [75d] incorrectly, it is your job to examine the definition and refute it." If they are friends, as you and I are, and want to interrogate one another, they should answer more gently and dialectically. It is more dialectical, perhaps, not only to answer with the truth but also in terms that the questioner acknowledges are familiar. And so, I will try to speak in this way to you.

Tell me, then, is there something you call an "extremity"? I mean this in the sense [75e] of "limit" and "terminal"; all of these I take to mean the same thing. Perhaps Prodikos would disagree, but you, at least, no doubt say that something has "reached a limit" and is "at an extremity". I want to say something like this, nothing fancy.

M: I do. And I think I understand what you mean.

[76a] **So:** What about this – is there something you call "a surface", and something else "a solid", the ones from geometry?

M: Yes, I do.

So: Then from this you might now understand me, how I define shape. For, of every shape I say this: that in which the solid ends, this is shape. To put it briefly, I would say that shape is the limit of a solid.

M: But what do you say about color, Socrates?

So: You are outrageous, Meno! You impose the trouble of answering on an old man and aren't willing to recollect and tell me what Gorgias says virtue is.

[76b] **M:** Just tell me this, Socrates, and I will tell you.

So: Even someone blindfolded would know, Meno, from your conversation, that you are beautiful and still have lovers.

M: What?

So: Because you do nothing but give orders, like spoiled children do, behaving like tyrants for as long as they are young. You have probably detected in me the fault of [76c] being susceptible to the beautiful, so I will please you by answering.

M: By all means, do me the favor.

So: Do you want me to answer in the style of Gorgias, the way that you would be most likely to follow?

M: I do, of course.

So: Don't both of you talk about things having certain effluences, as Empedokles does?

M: Absolutely.

So: And channels into which and out of which the effluences travel?

M: Certainly.

So: And some of the effluences fit some of the channels, while others are smaller [76d] or larger?

M: That's right.

So: Don't you also call something "sight"?

M: I do.

So: From this, then, "please take my meaning", said Pindar. Color is an effluence from shapes, which fits sight and is perceived.

M: I think you have stated your reply brilliantly, Socrates.

So: Perhaps because it was given in a way familiar to you. And I think you can work out from this statement what sound is, and smell, and the others of this sort.

[76e] **M:** Certainly.

So: It's a grandiose response, Meno, and so it's more pleasing to you than the one about shape.

M: It is to me, anyway.

So: And yet it isn't, son of Alexidemos, as I am persuaded that the other is better. And I think it wouldn't seem so to you if you didn't have to leave before the mysteries, as you mentioned yesterday, but could stick around and be initiated.

[77a] **M:** But I would stay, Socrates, if you will tell me lots of things like this.

So: I will spare no effort, both for your sake and mine, to say such things, but I might not be able to tell you many of them. But you come on and try to keep your promise to me, to say of virtue in general what it is. And quit making many out of one, as those who make jokes say whenever someone shatters something, but keeping it [77b] whole and healthy, tell me what virtue is. I've given you some models, at least.

M: Well then, it seems to me, Socrates, that virtue is, as the poet says, "to delight in fine things and be capable of them". I too say that this is virtue, desiring fine things and being able to bring them about.

So: Do you mean that the person who desires fine things desires good things?

M: Most of all.

So: This is assuming that amongst people, some desire bad things and some good [77c] things? You don't think that everyone, best of men, desires good things?

M: No, I don't.

So: Then some desire bad things?

M: Yes.

So: Thinking the bad things to be good, you mean? Or also knowing that they are bad and nonetheless desiring them?

M: I think there are both.

So: Do you really think someone, knowing that the bad things are bad, desires them?

M: Absolutely.

So: Desires what, do you say? To get them for himself?

M: Yes, to get them. What else?

[77d] **So:** Thinking that the bad things will help the person who gets them, or knowing that the bad things harm the person who has them?

M: There are some who think they are beneficial and there are others who know that they harm.

So: Do you really think that they know that the bad things are bad, those who think bad things are beneficial?

M: I don't believe that at all.

So: So, it is clear that these people do not desire bad things, those who are ignorant of them, but desire things they believe to be good, even though they are in fact [77e] bad. These ignorant people, then, who think they are good, it's clear that they desire good things. Or not?

M: They probably do.

So: What then? Those who desire bad things, according to you, thinking that bad things harm the person who suffers them, do they know that they will be harmed by them?

M: Necessarily.

[78a] **So:** But they think anyone who is harmed is miserable, to the extent that they are harmed?

M: This is also necessary.

So: Aren't miserable people unhappy?

M: I, for one, think so.

So: Is there anyone who wishes to be miserable and unhappy?

M: I don't think so, Socrates.

So: Then no one, Meno, wants bad things, if they don't want such things. What else is there to being miserable than desiring and possessing bad things?

[78b] **M:** It's likely what you say is true, Socrates, and no one wants bad things for himself.

So: So, just now you were saying that virtue is desiring and being capable of good things?

M: I did say that.

So: And with respect to what was said, the desiring occurs in everyone, and no one is better than anyone else in this respect?

M: Apparently.

So: Then it's clear that if one person is better than another, it would be in connection with superior capability.

M: Certainly.

So: This, then, it seems, is your account of virtue, the power to bring about good things.

[78c] **M:** To me, Socrates, it seems to be exactly as you now express it.

So: Let us examine this too, then, to see if you are right. Perhaps you spoke well. To be able to bring about good things, you say, is virtue?

M: I do.

So: And by "good things" don't you mean things such as health and property?

M: And I mean possessing gold and silver coins, too, and political honor and power.

So: Do you think there are other good things besides these kinds?

M: No, but I mean everything of these kinds.

[78d] **So:** Well, then. Virtue is the acquisition of gold and silver coins. So says Meno, the hereditary guest-friend of the Great King. Do you add "justly" or "piously" to this acquisition, Meno, or does it make no difference to you? If someone acquires these things unjustly, do you similarly call this "virtue"?

M: Certainly not, Socrates.

So: But "vice", instead?

M: Absolutely.

So: Then we must, it seems, add justice or moderation or piety to this acquisition, [78e] or some other part of virtue. If we don't, it won't be virtue, even if it is the acquisition of good things.

M: How could there be virtue without these?

So: So, not acquiring gold and silver, whenever it wouldn't be just, whether for oneself or someone else, isn't this lack of acquisition virtue, also?

M: It seems so.

So: Then virtue would be the provision of good things no more than the non-provision, but, as seems likely, virtue will be whatever is done with justice, and [79a] anything without all of these kinds of thing is vice.

M: I think it must be as you state.

So: And each of these we said a little while ago is a part of virtue – justice and moderation and everything like this?

M: Yes.

So: And so you are toying with me, Meno!

M: What?

So: Because just now I begged you not to shatter or cut up virtue, and gave you models of how you should answer, but you take no heed and tell me that virtue is to be [79b] able to bring about good things with justice, but this, you say, is a part of justice?

M: I do.

So: It follows from what you agree to that doing what one does with some part of virtue is virtue, since justice, you say, is a part of virtue, as are each of them. Then why do I say this? Because I begged you to state virtue as a whole but you are a long way from saying what it is. You say that every action is virtue, so long as it is done with a part of virtue, as though you had told me the whole of virtue and I recognize it now, [79c] even as you break it up into parts.

I think we need for you to answer the same question over again from the start, my dear Meno, "What is virtue?", if every action done with a part of virtue is virtue. For this is what a person means, who says this, that every action done with justice is virtue. Don't you think the same question needs answering, or do you think that someone knows what a part of virtue is without knowing virtue itself?

M: I don't think so, anyway.

[79d] **So:** And furthermore, if you remember, when I answered you just now about shape, we threw out the kind of answer which attempts to answer in terms of what is still being sought and not yet agreed upon.

M: And we were right to throw it out, Socrates.

So: So, don't think, you best of men, that, when still looking for what virtue as a whole is, by answering in terms of its parts you will clarify what it is, nor anything else by talking in this way, but rather that there's a need to ask the same question again, [79e] what is virtue about which you say what you say? Or do you think I'm talking nonsense?

M: I think what you say is right.

So: Then answer again from the beginning. What do you say virtue to be, both you and your friend?

M: Socrates, I heard before I even met you that you are always perplexed and [80a] making others perplexed. And now, as it seems to me, you are bewitching and flattering me and being totally enchanting, so that I have become completely perplexed. You seem to me, if it is possible to joke a little, to be, in appearance and in every way, exactly like the broad electric ray[1] of the sea, for it too numbs anyone who approaches and comes in contact with it, and now you seem to have put me in something like the [80b] same state. For truly I am numb, both my spirit and my tongue, and I do not know what response I could give you.

And even though I have on countless occasions said many things to many people about virtue, and did so well, as it seemed to me, anyway, now I cannot say at all what it is. I think you are wise not to sail away from here or go abroad, because if you acted in this way as a foreigner in another city, you would probably be arrested for sorcery.

So: You're a rascal, Meno, and you nearly deceived me.

M: Why, precisely?

[80c] **So:** I know the reason you drew an image of me.

M: Why, do you think?

So: So that I will draw one of you in return. I know this about all handsome men, that they enjoy images being made of them, because it benefits them, I think because the images of handsome men are also handsome. But I won't draw an image of you in return.

If the electric ray makes others numb by being itself numb, I am like it; if not, I am not. I do not make others perplexed by being without doubts myself; rather, I am [80d] utterly perplexed and in this way I make others perplexed. And now, concerning virtue, I don't know what it is, and you probably knew previously, until I got hold of you and now you're certainly like someone who doesn't know. Nonetheless, I want to investigate it with you and search out what on earth it is.

M: How will you search for it, Socrates, when you have no idea what it is? What kind of thing from among those you are ignorant of will you set before yourself to look for? And even if you happened exactly upon it, how would you recognize that this is what you didn't know?

[80e] **So:** I understand what you want to say, Meno. Do you see how sophistical this argument is that you're dragging up, that a person cannot search either for what he knows or what he doesn't know? For he cannot search for what he knows – he knows it, and there is no need to search for such a thing – nor for what he doesn't know – since he doesn't know what he's searching for.

---

[1] Either Torpedo marmorata or Torpedo torpedo.

[81a] **M:** Well, doesn't this argument seem to be finely stated, Socrates?

So: Not to me.

M: Can you say how?

So: I can, since I have heard wise men and women, about divine affairs …

M: Uttering what speech?

So: A true and beautiful one, it seems to me.

M: What is it, and who is saying it?

So: Those saying it are some of the priests and priestesses whose business it is to [81b] be able to give an account of their practices. And Pindar says it too and many others of the poets, those who are divinely inspired. And what they say is the following – see if you think they speak the truth:

They say that the soul of man is immortal. At one time it comes to an end – which people call "dying" – and at another it is reborn, but it is never destroyed and so, one must live life as piously as possible, since to those from whom …

… Persephone accepts compensation for her ancient grief,
To the sunlight above, in the ninth year, their
Souls she again returns.
[81c] From them come noble kings,
Increasing in strength and wisdom, men both swift and great,
And for the rest of time called "hallowed heroes" by men.

When the soul is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen the things here and the things in that land of Hades – everything, in fact – there is nothing that it has not learned, and so it's no surprise that it can recollect about virtue and other things that it knew before. And because all of nature is of the same kind and the soul has learned [81d] everything, nothing prevents a soul that has recollected just one thing – which people call "learning" – from rediscovering everything for itself, so long as it is brave and doesn't give up the search. For searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection.

Therefore, we must not be persuaded by this sophistical account, since that one would make us lazy and is pleasant for faint-hearted men to hear, whereas this one [81e] makes them energetic and eager to search. Believing this one to be true, I want to search with you for what virtue is.

M: Yes, Socrates. But what do you mean by this, that we do not learn and what is called "learning" is recollection? Can you teach me that this is so?

So: As I was saying a moment ago, Meno, you are a rascal, and now you are [82a] asking if I can *teach* you what I say is *not teaching* but recollection, so that I will immediately be seen to contradict myself!

M: By Zeus, no, Socrates. I didn't say it for that reason, but out of habit. But if you can somehow show me that what you say is true, show me.

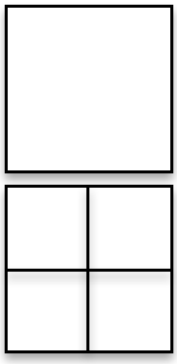
So: Although it's not easy, nonetheless I want to exert myself for your sake. [82b] Summon one of these many attendants of yours for me, whichever you like, so that I can prove it to you in his case.

M: Certainly. [To the slave:] Step forward here.

So: Now, is he Greek and speaks Greek?

M: Absolutely, yes. He was born in the house.

So: Then pay close attention to see which you think is happening, whether he is recollecting or is learning from me.



M: I certainly will.

So: Tell me, boy, do you know that a square is like this?

Slave: I do.

[82c] **So:** And so, a square has these lines, four of them, all equal?

Slave: Of course.

So: And these ones going through the center are also equal?

Slave: Yes.

So: Okay. And there could be larger and smaller versions of this area?

Slave: Certainly.

So: Now, if this side were two feet and this side two feet also, how many feet would the whole be? Look at it like this: if this one were two feet but this one only one foot, wouldn't the area have to be two feet taken once?

Slave: Yes.

[82d] **So:** When this one is also two feet, there would be twice two?

Slave: There would.

So: An area of twice two feet?

Slave: Yes.

So: How much is twice two feet? Calculate and tell me.

Slave: Four, Socrates.

So: Now, couldn't there be one different from this, doubled, but of the same kind, with all the lines equal, as in that one?

Slave: Yes.

So: And how many feet in area?

Slave: Eight.

So: Come then, try to tell me how long each line of that one will be. In this one, [82e] it's two, but what about in that doubled one?

Slave: It's clearly double, Socrates.

So: You see, Meno, that I am not teaching anything, but put everything as a question. He now believes he knows what sort of line the eight-foot area comes from. Or don't you think so?

M: I do.

So: And does he know?

M: Not at all.

So: He believes it comes from the double?

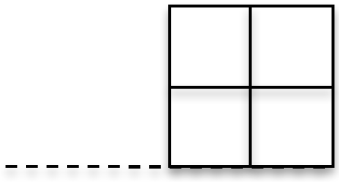
M: Yes.

So: Observe him recollecting in sequence, as one ought to recollect.

[83a] Tell me, you say the double area comes to be from the double line? I mean this kind, not one with this one long and this one short, but equal all around like this one, but double its size, that is, eight feet. See if you still think it comes from the double.

Slave: I do.

So: Wouldn't this [line] itself become double if we add another of the same length here?

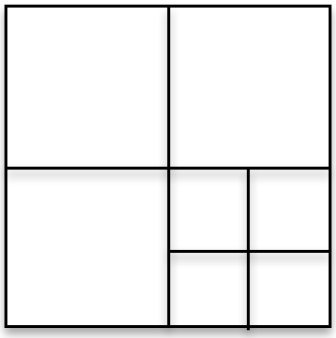


Slave: Of course.

So: From this, you say, there will be an eight-foot area, if there are four of the same length?

[83b] **Slave:** Yes.

So: Let us use it to draw four equal lines. Isn't this exactly what you say the eight-foot area is?



Slave: Absolutely.

So: Within this there are these four, each of which is equal to this four-foot area?

Slave: Yes.

So: What area is this? Isn't it four times as large?

Slave: Yes, by Zeus.

So: It is double, the one four times as large?

Slave: No, by Zeus.

So: But how many times larger is it?

Slave: Four times.

[83c] **So:** Then the area that comes from the double line, boy, is not double but four times the area.

Slave: You are right.

So: Since four times four is sixteen, is it not?

Slave: Yes.

So: The eight-foot area comes from what line? Based on this line, isn't it four times the size?

Slave: So I say.

So: But the quarter area is based on this one here, half its size?

Slave: Yes.

So: Well then. The eight-foot area is double this one, and half that one?

Slave: Yes.

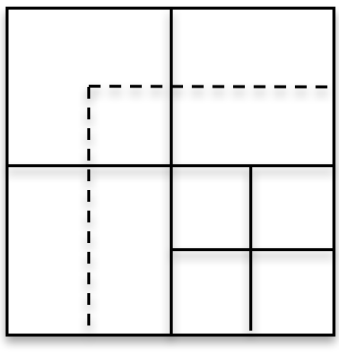
[83d] **So:** Won't it come from a line longer than this, but shorter than that? Or not?

Slave: It seems so to me.

So: Well said; answer as it seems to you. Now tell me, was this line not two feet long, and that one four?

Slave: Yes.

So: So, the eight-foot area must come from a line longer than two feet but less than four?



Slave: It must.

[83e] **So:** Then try to say how long you say it is.

Slave: Three feet.

So: If it really were three feet, we will take half as much again of this one and it will be three feet? For this is two and this is one? And from here, this is two and this is one. And the area you mentioned comes into being.

Slave: Yes.

So: So, if this side is three and this one also three, the whole area is three times three?

Slave: It seems so.

So: Three times three are how many feet?

Slave: Nine.

So: But we need the double area to be how many feet?

Slave: Eight.

So: Then the eight-foot area certainly doesn't come from the three-foot line.

Slave: Not at all.

So: But from what length? Try to tell us clearly. And if you do not want to [84a] calculate it, point out the length instead.

Slave: By Zeus, Socrates, I have no idea.

So: Consider again, Meno, as he proceeds in the recollection, what point is he now at? The first time, he did not know what the line of the eight-foot area is, just like he still doesn't know now. But whereas he thought then that he did know it, and answered confidently like someone who knows, and did not think himself in any difficulty, now he actually thinks he is in trouble, he doesn't know and likewise does not [84b] think he knows.

M: That's true.

So: Is he now in a better position concerning the thing he does not know?

M: I think that's also true.

So: Putting him in difficulties and numbing him, like the electric ray, is there any harm in it?

M: I don't think so.

So: In fact, it's likely we have done him a good deed, with regard to finding out how things are. For now he doesn't know and would be glad to know, whereas before, he thought it would be easy to speak well in front of many people and on many [84c] occasions about the doubled area, how it must have a line double in length.

M: Probably.

So: Do you think that before he would try to search for or understand what he thinks he knows but doesn't know, until he fell into difficulty and realized he doesn't know, and yearned to know?

M: I don't think so, Socrates.

So: He has benefitted from becoming numb?

M: I think so.

So: Observe, then, how, from this perplexity, he will discover it after all, searching along with me, and I doing nothing except posing questions and not teaching. [84d] Be on the lookout for me teaching and spelling it out for him, and not asking for his opinions.

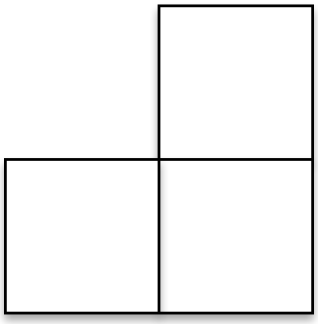
Tell me: we have here our four-foot area? Do you understand?

Slave: I do.

So: And we can add another one to it, this one, equal?

Slave: Yes.

So: And this third one, equal to each of these?



Slave: Yes.

So: And we can fill in this space here in the corner?

Slave: Of course.

So: So that there are precisely these four equal areas?

[84e] **Slave:** Yes.

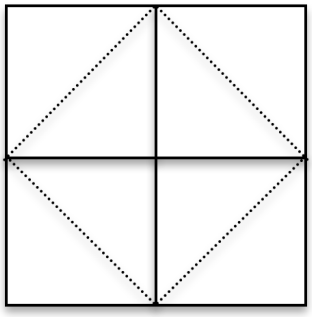
So: Well then, this whole thing would be how many times this one?

Slave: Four times.

So: But we need to produce double. Or don't you remember?

Slave: Of course.

So: Now isn't there this same line, going from corner to corner, cutting each of [85a] these areas in two?



Slave: Yes.

So: So, there will be these four equal lines, enclosing this area?

Slave: There will.

So: Look, then. How large is this area?

Slave: I don't understand.

So: There are four areas, and each line has divided each of them in half internally? Or not?

Slave: Yes.

So: And how many feet are in this area?

Slave: Four.

So: And how many in this one?

Slave: Two.

So: And four is how many times two?

Slave: Double.

[85b] **So:** So, this, then, would be how many feet?

Slave: Eight.

So: Coming from what line?

Slave: From this one.

So: From the one stretching from corner to corner of the four-foot area?

Slave: Yes.

So: The experts call this the "diagonal". And so, if we name this the diagonal, it would be from the diagonal, according to you, slave of Meno, that the double area comes into being.

Slave: Exactly so, Socrates.

So: What do you think, Meno? Is there any answer that he gave that was not his own belief?

[85c] **M:** No, they were his own.

So: Even though he did not know, as we were saying a little earlier.

M: You are right.

So: These beliefs, then, were within him. Or not?

M: Yes.

So: The man who does not know, then, concerning what he does not know, has within himself true beliefs about what he doesn't know?

M: Apparently.

So: At present, these beliefs are like a dream to him, having just now been stirred up. But if someone will put these questions to him on many occasions and in many ways, you know that his knowledge of these matters will eventually be as accurate as [85d] anyone's.

M: It's likely.

So: Won't he know it not by anyone teaching but through questioning and him regaining the knowledge from within himself?

M: Yes.

So: And isn't him regaining the knowledge from within himself recollection?

M: Absolutely.

So: The knowledge he now has, he either gained at some time or always had it?

M: Yes.

So: If he always had it, he was always knowing, and if he gained it at some time, he would not have acquired it in his present life, at any rate. Or has someone taught him geometry? Because he will do the same thing for all geometry, and all other learning. Is there someone who has taught him all these? I suppose you would be one to know, especially since he was born and raised in your household.

M: And I know that no one ever gave him instruction.

So: But does he have these beliefs, or not?

M: It seems necessary, Socrates.

[86a] **So:** If he didn't acquire them in this life, then, the following becomes immediately obvious, that he had and learned them at some other time.

M: Apparently.

So: And this is the time when he was not a human?

M: Yes.

So: If there are true beliefs within him during the time when he both is and is not a human being, which each become knowledge when stirred up by questioning, then won't his soul be in a state of having learned throughout all time? Since it's clear that throughout all time he was or was not a human?

M: Apparently.

[86b] **So:** Then, If we always possess the truth about things in the soul, the soul would be immortal, so that the person who doesn't happen to have knowledge now, that is, who hasn't recollected, should be brave and try to search for it and recollect?

M: Your words seem good to me, Socrates, somehow or other.

So: And to me too, Meno. I wouldn't strongly insist on the other aspects of the argument, but that we would become better men and braver and less lazy if we believe it is necessary to search for what one doesn't know, rather than if we think that we can't [86c] discover what we don't know and should not look for it, for this I will fight strongly, if I am able, in both word and deed.

M: There again, your words seem good to me, Socrates.

So: Since we agree that one must inquire into what one doesn't know, do you want us to try to look together for what virtue is?

M: Certainly. Although, of course, I would be most pleased to look into and hear about what I asked at the start, whether we should pursue virtue as something [86d] teachable, or natural, or occurring in men in some other way.

So: If I were in charge, Meno, not only of myself but of you too, we wouldn't examine whether virtue is teachable or not teachable until we had discovered the main point, *what it is*. But since you aren't even trying to control yourself, so that you would in fact be free, but attempt to rule me and take charge, I will agree with you – what else can I do? So, it seems we must investigate what kind of thing it is when we don't yet [86e] know what it is.

But if nothing else, at least loosen your control a little bit for me and agree to examine whether it is acquired by teaching or however it is acquired on the basis of a hypothesis. By "on the basis of a hypothesis" I mean in the way geometers often examine things, whenever someone asks them something, such as whether a certain [87a] area can be inscribed within a circle in the shape of a triangle, and one of them might say "I don't yet know if it can be, but I think I have a sort of hypothesis that's useful for such a problem: if this area, when applied to the given line, is the kind that leaves behind an area like this one which was stretched out, I think one thing follows, or another, if this is impossible. So, by hypothesizing, I am willing to tell you what follows [87b] concerning its inscription within the circle, whether it is possible or not."

It's the same way with virtue, since we don't know what it is or what it's like, let's examine whether it is teachable or not teachable on the basis of a hypothesis, and say the following, "If virtue were what kind of thing, of the things related to the soul, would it then be teachable or not teachable? First of all, if it is different from, or some sort of, knowledge, is it acquired by teaching or not – or, as we put it just now, by recollection; it [87c] makes no difference to us what name we use. Is it teachable? Or is it clear to everyone that a man can be taught nothing except knowledge?

M: I think so.

So: Then, if virtue is a type of knowledge, it would clearly be acquired by teaching.

M: Of course.

So: We finished that quickly, that if it is of one kind, it's teachable, but not, if it's of another.

M: Certainly.

So: After this, we should probably investigate whether virtue is knowledge or of a different kind than what knowledge is.

[87d] **M:** That does seem to be what should be examined next.

So: What then? Don't we say that this – virtue – is good? Does that hypothesis still hold for us, that it is good?

M: Absolutely.

So: If there is also something else that is good and distinct from knowledge, perhaps virtue wouldn't be a kind of knowledge. But if nothing is good that knowledge does not embrace, we would be right to suspect that it is some kind of knowledge.

M: That's right.

So: And next, by virtue we are good?

M: Yes.

[87e] **So:** And if good, we are beneficial? Since anything good is beneficial. Or not?

M: Yes.

So: Virtue also is beneficial, then?

M: Necessarily, based on what has been agreed.

So: Let's examine then, taking each one in turn, what kinds of things benefit us: health, we say, and strength, and beauty and property, of course. We say that these and things like them are beneficial. Or not?

M: Yes.

[88a] **So:** But we say that these same things sometimes also are harmful. Or would you say something different from this?

M: No, exactly that.

So: Do you see, then, what it is that guides each of these when it benefits us, and what when it harms us? Isn't it true that when correctly used, it benefits, but when not, it harms?

M: Certainly.

So: In addition, then, let us examine the things related to the soul. There is something you call "moderation" and "justice" and "bravery" and "intelligence" and "memory" and "magnanimity" and everything of this sort?

[88b] **M:** There is.

So: Examine, then, the ones of these that seem to you not to be knowledge but different from knowledge, whether they don't sometimes harm and sometimes benefit? Bravery, for example, when bravery is without prudence and is a kind of daring. Isn't it that whenever a man is daring without understanding, he is harmed, but with understanding he is benefitted?

M: Yes.

So: And similarly for moderation and intelligence: when acquired by learning [88c] and discipline they are beneficial, but without understanding, harmful?

M: Very much so.

So: In sum, all of the soul's endeavors and acts of endurance result in happiness when guided by prudence, but in the opposite when they are without thought?

M: It's likely.

So: If virtue is one of the things in the soul and is necessarily beneficial to it, it must be prudence, since all of these things of the soul are in themselves neither beneficial [88d] nor harmful, but become beneficial or harmful when accompanied by prudence or foolishness. According to this account, since virtue is beneficial, it must be a kind of prudence.

M: I think so.

So: And the other things too that we were just now talking about, wealth and such like, that are sometimes good and sometimes harmful, in the way that prudence [88e] made the goods of the soul beneficial by guiding the rest of the soul, in the same way, doesn't the soul make them beneficial by using and guiding them correctly, but if incorrectly, harmful?

M: Certainly.

So: The soul with intelligence guides correctly, while the one without misses the mark?

M: That's correct.

So: And don't we say the same in every case, all the other goods a person has depend upon the soul, and the goods of the soul itself depend upon prudence, if they [89a] are going to be good. By this reasoning, the beneficial would be prudence. And do we say virtue is beneficial?

M: Certainly.

So: Do we say virtue is prudence, either the whole or some part of it?

M: What you've said seems well said to me, Socrates.

So: Then if this is how things are, good men would not be so by nature?

M: I think not.

[89b] **So:** If they were, I suppose the following would be true: if good men were good by nature, there would no doubt be some people who knew which of the young people had good natures, and we would have taken the ones so designated and guarded them in the treasury, sealing them up more carefully than gold, so that no one would corrupt them and they would be useful to the city when they come of age.

M: That's quite likely, Socrates.

So: But since the good things are not good by nature, are they so by learning?

[89c] **M:** I think it must be, now. And clearly, Socrates, according to the hypothesis, that virtue is knowledge, it's acquired by teaching.

So: Perhaps, by Zeus. But maybe we did not properly agree to this.

M: A moment ago it seemed fine to me.

So: But it needs to seem finely stated not just a moment ago but in the present and in the future, if any of it is going to be sound.

[89d] **M:** But why? What do you see that makes you dissatisfied with it and skeptical that virtue is not knowledge?

So: I will tell you, Meno. That it is teachable if it is knowledge, I don't take that back or think it wasn't well said, but rather, that it is knowledge. See if my doubt seems reasonable to you. Tell me this, if something is teachable, not just virtue, wouldn't there have to be teachers and learners of it?

[89e] **M:** I think so.

So: And again, conversely, if there are neither teachers of it nor learners, would we be right to infer that it is not acquired by teaching?

M: That's true. But don't you think there are teachers of virtue?

So: I often investigated whether anyone is a teacher of it, doing everything I can but not able to find any. Indeed, I search with the co-operation of many people, and [90a] especially with those I think are most experienced in the matter. And now, perfectly for us, Anutos[2] here has sat down, with whom we can share the search. It would be fitting for us to make him a partner, because, first, Anutos here had a father, Anthemion, both wealthy and wise, who became wealthy not by accident or because of a gift, like Ismenias the Theban who recently acquired Polukrates's fortune. Rather, he acquired it by his own wisdom and dedication, and besides, he did not seem to be an

[2] Anutos was one of Socrates's accusers, in *Socrates's Defense*. See in particular 94e3, below, where Anutos warns Socrates to be careful.

[90b] arrogant citizen or puffed up and offensive, but a decent and orderly man, and further, the majority of the Athenians believe he reared and educated this man well, since they are electing him to the highest offices. It is proper to investigate with someone like this whether there are or are not teachers of virtue, and who they are. So, join the search with us, Anutos, myself and your guest-friend[3] Meno here, related to who might be teachers in this matter.

Look at it this way: if we want Meno to become a good doctor, to what teachers [90c] would we send him? Would it not be to the doctors?

Anutos (**An**): Certainly.

So: And what if we want him to become a good shoemaker, to the shoemakers?

An: Yes.

So: And others similarly?

An: Certainly.

So: Repeat that again for me. Sending him to the doctors, we say, would be a good place to send him, wanting him to become a doctor. When we say this, are we [90d] saying that we would be sensible to send him to these people, those who lay claim to the craft rather than those who don't, and who charge fees for this very thing, declaring themselves to be teachers of anyone who wants to come and learn? Thinking along these lines, would we assign him properly?

An: Yes.

So: And also with flute-playing and the others of the same kind? If we wanted to [90e] make someone a flute-player it would be very stupid to be unwilling to send him to those who promise to teach him the craft and who charge a fee, but to cause problems for others by seeking to learn from those who neither put themselves forward as teachers nor have any students in the subject which we wanted him, the one we would send, to learn. Doesn't that seem very irrational to you?

An: Yes, by Zeus, it does, and ignorant in addition.

[91a] **So:** Well said. And now you can deliberate along with me about your guest-friend Meno here. For he has been telling me for a long time, Anutos, that he desires the wisdom and virtue by which men manage households and cities, and take care of their parents, and know how to receive and send off citizens and foreigners in the manner worthy of a good man. Think about to whom we would be right to send him, [91b] with respect to this virtue. Or is it clear, according to our recent principle, that it is to those who promise to be teachers of virtue and declare themselves available to any Greek who wants to learn, and who set a fee and collect it?

An: And who do you say these are, Socrates?

So: You know very well that these are the men people call "sophists".

[91c] **An:** By Heracles! Quiet, Socrates! Let none of my household or friends, whether Athenian or foreigner, be seized by the kind of madness that would send them to be ruined by these people, since they are obviously the ruin and corruption of those they associate with.

---

[3] There was a special relationship of hospitality between these two families, perhaps established by Anthemion and Meno's grandfather. Meno is about 19 years old. Anutos is of the previous generation (and Socrates is about 67). See also 78d.

So: How do you mean, Anutos? Are they, alone of those who claim to know how to do some benefit, so different from the others that they, like the others, do not benefit whatever one might entrust to them, but also, on the contrary, corrupt it? And think [91d] they are worthy of openly collecting money for this? I don't know if I can believe you.

I know of a certain man – Protagoras – who made more money from this wisdom than Pheidias, who produced such noticeably fine works, and ten other sculptors besides. Surely what you say is outrageous, if, on the one hand, those who repair old sandals and mend cloaks would be found out within a month if they returned the [91e] sandals and cloaks in a worse state than they received them, and if they did this, would quickly die of hunger, while Protagoras, on the other, avoids detection by the whole of Greece as he corrupts his associates and sends them away worse than when he received them, and for forty years – since I believe he died at nearly seventy and was forty years at his work – for all that time, even in the present day, he lost none of his reputation, and not just Protagoras but a whole lot of others too, some born before him [92a] and some who are still alive now.

Should we really say, then, according to what you said, that they swindle and ruin the young knowingly? Or do they deceive even themselves and in this way we will judge them to be mad, whom some people say to be the wisest of men?

An: They are far from being mad, Socrates. Much more so are the young men who give them money, and still more those who entrust them to them, their relatives, [92b] and most especially of all, the cities, who allow them to enter and don't drive them away, whether it's a foreigner who tries to do something like this or a citizen.

So: Did some one of the sophists wrong you, Anutos, or why are you so harsh towards them?

An: By Zeus, I have never associated with any one of them, nor would I allow anyone I know to do so!

So: You have no experience whatsoever with these men?

M: May it always be so!

[92c] **So:** But how, then, you strange fellow, would you know about the matter, whether there's anything good or bad in it, if you had no experience of it at all?

An: Easily! I know who they are anyway, whether I have experience of them or not.

So: Perhaps you are a seer, Anutos, since, from what you yourself say, I would be puzzled how else you would know about them. But, in fact, we won't look into who [92d] these people are, who Meno would go to and become worse – they are, if you wish, the sophists – but tell us the people, and do your family friend here a good deed by telling him, whom he should go to, in a city so large as this, to gain, worthy of the title, the virtue I was just now describing.

An: Why don't *you* tell him?

So: But I said whom I thought were teachers of it, though it turns out I was saying nothing, according to you. And perhaps you are saying something. But you take [92e] your turn and tell him which of the Athenians he might go to. Give the name of anyone you like.

An: Why should he hear the name of any one person? No matter what Athenian gentleman he meets, there is not one of them who wouldn't improve him more than the sophists, if he is willing to be persuaded.

So: Did these gentlemen become so spontaneously, learning from no one, but are [93a] nonetheless able to teach others these things they didn't learn?

An: I should think that they too learned from their predecessors, who were also gentlemen. Or don't you think there are many good men in this city?

So: I think, Anutos, that there are people here good at public affairs, and what is more, just as many as there were in the past. But they were not good *teachers* of their virtue, were they? This happens to be the focus of our argument, not whether there *are* good men here or not, and not whether there were in the past. Instead, we've been [93b] examining for a while whether virtue is teachable. This is what we're looking for when we're investigating whether the good men, both now and in the past, also knew how to pass on the virtue that made them good, or whether this can't be passed on to a man or accepted by one man from another. This is what Meno and I were investigating all along.

Look at it this way, given what you yourself say, would you not say that [93c] Themistokles was a good man?

An: I would; the best of all.

So: And so, a good teacher, too. If anyone else was a teacher of his own virtue, you would say he was?

An: I believe so, if he wanted to, anyway.

So: But do you believe that he did not want various others to become gentlemen, especially his own son, surely? Or do you think he refused him this and purposefully [93d] did not pass on the virtue which made him good? Or have you not heard that Themistokles taught his son Kleophantos to be a good horseman? He could stay standing upright on horses and throw a javelin from the horses upright, and perform many other amazing feats that he had him taught and made skilled in, any that were possessed by good teachers. Or haven't you heard this from your elders?

An: I have.

So: So, no one could allege that his son's nature was bad.

[93e] **An:** Presumably not.

So: But then what? That Kleophantos, son of Themistokles, became a good and wise man, with respect to the things that his father was – have you ever heard anyone, young or old, say that?

An: Certainly not.

So: But are we then to believe that he *did* want to teach his son these things, but to make him no better than his neighbors with respect to the wisdom in which he himself was skilled, if virtue were indeed teachable?

An: Presumably not, by Zeus.

So: Well, there you have the kind of teacher of virtue he was, the man you affirm was one of the best in the past. But let's look at another one, Aristeides, son of [94a] Lusimachos. Or don't you agree that he was good?

An: I do, absolutely.

So: This man too gave his son Lusimachos the finest education in Athens, with respect to all the things that are the province of good teachers, but do you think he was made a better man than anyone else? You associate with him, in fact, and you see what kind of man he is.

[94b] Or take Perikles, if you like, a man of such magnificent wisdom. You know that he raised two sons, Paralos and Xanthippos?

An: I do.

So: And they, as I'm sure you know, he taught to be horsemen second to no one in Athens, and in music and athletics and anything else that there's an art of, he brought them up to be second to none. And did he not want to make them good men? I think he wanted to, but maybe it's not teachable.

And so that you don't think that it was only a few and the least able Athenians [94c] who were unable to succeed in this endeavor, remember that Thucydides also raised two sons, Melesias and Stephanos, and taught them well in various things and in particular they wrestled best of all the Athenians. He placed one with Xanthias and the other with Eudoros. These had a reputation as the best wrestlers of the time. Or don't you remember?

An: So I've heard.

So: Clearly, he would never have taught his sons those things that require [94d] spending money to teach but fail to teach them what would make them good men, without paying anything, *if* it was teachable? Maybe Thucydides was an inferior man, without many friends in Athens or among the allies? But he came from an important family and had great power in the city and among the Greeks, such that if this was teachable, he could find someone who would make his sons good, someone at [94e] home or abroad, if he himself lacked the time on account of attending to the city. But in fact, Anutos my friend, virtue is not teachable.

An: I think, Socrates, that you readily speak ill of men. I would advise you, if you are willing to listen to me, to be discreet. As is probably the case in other cities, it is easier to do men harm than good, and certainly in this one. But I think you already [95a] know that.

So: Meno, Anutos seems angry, and it's no wonder, since he thinks, first, that I am slandering these men, and second, includes himself among them. But if he ever learns what slander is, he will stop being angry, though at the moment he doesn't know. Tell me, don't you think there are fine and noble men where you come from, too?

M: Very much so.

[95b] **So:** Well, then, are they willing to provide themselves as teachers of the young, and do they agree that there are teachers and that virtue is teachable?

M: By Zeus, no, Socrates. Sometimes you might hear that it's teachable, and sometimes that it's not.

So: Shall we say that people who can't even agree on this are teachers of this subject?

M: I don't think so, Socrates.

So: What, then? These sophists, who are the only people to declare themselves able, do you think they are teachers of virtue?

[95c] **M:** Now, this is something that strikes me about Gorgias in particular, that you'll never hear him promising this, and he mocks others when he hears them promising. Though he does think people must be made clever speakers.

So: Then you don't think that the sophists are teachers either?

M: I'm unable to say, Socrates. I am affected in the same way as many others: sometimes I think so, sometimes not.

So: Do you realize that it's not only you and the other men in public life who sometimes think that it's teachable and sometimes not, but the poet Theognis, too, you [95d] know, says the same thing?

M: In which verses?

So: In the elegies where he says …

"Eat and drink with them and among them
Sit, and please them, whose power is great.
For you will teach yourself goodness from the good. If with the bad
[95e] You spend time, you will lose what intelligence you already have."

You see that in these words he speaks as though virtue is teachable?

M: Apparently.

So: But elsewhere he makes a small change …

"If good sense could be formed" he says, "and implanted in man"

he says, roughly, that

"Fees many and large would they receive"

– those who are able to do this. And

"Never from a good father comes bad,
[96a] Obeying wise commands. But by teaching
Never will you make the bad man good."[4]

Doesn't it strike you that he is contradicting himself on these matters?

M: It seems so.

So: Can you name any other subject of which the people who claim to be teachers are not agreed to be teachers of others and even thought not to know it and to be bad [96b] teachers of the very thing they profess to teach, while those who are agreed to be gentlemen sometimes say it is teachable, and sometimes not? Would you say that people who are so confused about anything are properly teachers?

M: By Zeus, not I.

So: Then if neither the sophists nor those who are gentlemen are teachers of this subject, clearly there are no others?

M: I don't think so.

[96c] **So:** But if there are no teachers, there are no learners?

M: I think what you say is right.

So: We are agreed, then, that a subject which has neither teachers nor learners is also not teachable?

M: We are agreed.

So: And so, there don't seem to be any teachers of virtue?

---

[4] Theognis *Elegiac Poems* 33-36 and 434-438. Available at Perseus: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0479%3Avolume%3D1%3Atext%3D11%3Asection%3D2

M: That's right.

So: And if no teachers, no learners?

M: It seems so.

So: Then virtue would not be teachable?

[96d] **M:** It's not likely, if we have been examining things correctly. As a result, I am wondering, Socrates, whether there are any good men at all, or what method there is by which good men come into being.

So: There's a chance, Meno, that you and I are inferior men, and that Gorgias didn't educate you sufficiently, nor Prodikos me. More than anything, then, we should turn our attention to ourselves and search for someone who will improve us at least in [96e] some way. I say this looking back over our recent investigation, how we embarrassingly failed to notice that men do things well and properly not only when they are guided by knowledge, and that is perhaps also why detecting whatever way men become good escapes us.

M: How do you mean, Socrates?

So: This: we rightly agreed that good men must be beneficial, and that this can't [97a] be any other way. Right?

M: Yes.

So: And that they will be beneficial if they guide us properly in our affairs, this too we correctly agreed to, I suppose?

M: Yes.

So: But that he cannot guide correctly if he is not a wise man, we are alike in having agreed to this incorrectly.

M: How do you mean?

So: I will tell you. If someone knew the road to Larisa, or anywhere you like, could walk there and guide others, surely he would guide them correctly and well?

M: Certainly.

[97b] **So:** And what if someone correctly believed which was the correct road, though he had not gone, and lacked knowledge, wouldn't he also guide them correctly?

M: Certainly.

So: And as long as he holds onto the correct belief, I suppose, of which another had knowledge, he won't be any worse a guide than the one who has knowledge, believing the truth but lacking knowledge of it.

M: No worse at all.

So: Then true beliefs are no worse a guide to correct actions than prudence. And this is what we left out in our previous investigation into what virtue is, when we said [97c] that prudence alone guides correct action. As a matter of fact, there was also true belief.

M: Very likely.

So: True belief is thus no less beneficial than knowledge.

M: Less, Socrates, to the extent that the person who has knowledge would always be successful, while the person with the true belief would sometimes be, and sometimes not be.

So: How do you mean? Won't the person who always has true belief always succeed, for as long as he believes correctly?

M: It seems necessary, to me. And so, I wonder, Socrates, if this is so, why [97d] knowledge is valued so much more than true belief, and what makes one of them different from the other.

So: Do you know what makes you wonder, or shall I tell you?

M: Please, tell me.

So: Because you haven't paid attention to the statues of Daidalos. Perhaps there are none where you live.

M: What are you thinking about when you say this?

So: Because if it is not tied down, it sneaks off and runs away, but if it is tied down, it remains by you.

[97e] **M:** So what?

So: Acquiring one of his unbound statues is not worthy of any great honor, like a runaway slave, since it won't stay with you. But a bound one is worth much, since his works are very beautiful.

What am I thinking about when I say this? About the true beliefs. Since the true beliefs, too, for as much time as they stay with you, are fine possessions and bring about entirely good results. But they are unwilling to stick around for long, and they run away [98a] out of the soul of a man and so are not worth much, until someone binds them by working out the reason.

And this, Meno my companion, is recollection, as we agreed previously. Whenever they are bound, first, they become knowledge, and second, steadfast. For these reasons knowledge is more honored than true belief, and knowledge differs from true belief in being bound.

M: Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, it's something like that.

[98b] **So:** Of course, I'm speaking as someone who doesn't know but is guessing. That true belief and knowledge are different from one another, I certainly don't think I'm guessing about that, and if I claim to know anything at all – and there are few things I would say that about – I would put this down as one of the things I know.

M: And what you say is right, Socrates.

[98c] **So:** Well, then, isn't this right, that being guided by a true belief makes the outcome of each of our actions no less beneficial than when guided by knowledge?

M: This too seems right to me.

So: And a true belief is no worse and no less beneficial in our actions than knowledge, nor the man who has true beliefs than the man who has knowledge.

M: It is.

So: And we agree that the good man is beneficial?

M: Yes.

So: Since, therefore, men are good and useful to their cities not only because of knowledge, if there are any such men, but also because of correct belief, and neither of [98d] these two arises naturally in men, neither knowledge nor true belief, … or do you think either of them comes naturally?

M: I don't.

So: Then, since they're not by nature, neither would good men come to be by nature.

M: Certainly not.

So: And since they are not by nature, we began examining the next thing, whether it is teachable.

M: Yes.

So: And it seemed that it was teachable, if virtue is prudence?

M: Yes.

So: And if it was teachable, it would be prudence?

M: Certainly.

[98e] **So:** And if there were teachers of it, it would be teachable, but if none, not teachable?

M: That's right.

So: But we have agreed that in fact there are no teachers of it?

M: We have.

So: And then we agreed that it was neither teachable nor wisdom?

M: Certainly.

So: But we do agree that it is some good, at least?

M: Yes.

So: And what guides correctly is beneficial and good?

M: Certainly.

[99a] **So:** And that these are the only two things that guide correctly, true belief and knowledge, and a man who guides correctly has these. For things that happen correctly by chance do not occur by human guidance, but whenever a man guides towards what is correct, these two things guide, true belief and knowledge.

M: It seems so to me.

So: But since it is not teachable, virtue can no longer be knowledge?

M: Apparently not.

[99b] **So:** Since there are two good and beneficial things and one has been "acquitted", knowledge would not be a guide of political activity.

M: I think not.

So: So, it's not by some kind of wisdom, or by being wise, that such men as Themistokles and the like, and those whom Anutos here was talking about just now, guide their cities. And this is why they are unable to make others the same kind of person as they are, because they are not like this through knowledge.

M: It's likely to be as you say, Socrates.

So: If it is not knowledge, then right belief is what remains. And by using this the [99c] political men organize the cities, and are no different, as far as knowledge goes, from those who deliver oracles and prophesy, since these say true things when they are inspired, lots of them, but know nothing about what they're saying.

M: This is probably how it is.

So: So, Meno, are these men worthy of being called "divine", those who bring about many great things by what they do and say without any intelligence?

M: Certainly.

So: Then we could properly call "divine" those soothsayers and seers we were just [99d] talking about and all of the poets and no less than these we could call the politicians "divine" and "inspired", filled with the breath and possessed by the god,

whenever they successfully speak on many great matters without knowing what they're talking about.

M: Certainly.

So: And women, too, of course, Meno, call good men "divine", and the Spartans, whenever they praise someone as a good man, they say, "A divine man, he."

[99e] **M:** And apparently, Socrates, they speak correctly. Though Anutos here is annoyed at what you say.

So: It matters nothing to me; we will talk with him again. But for now, if we have investigated and spoken well in the course of all this talk, virtue would be neither by nature nor by teaching, but, to those in whom it is present, by a share of the divine, [100a] without intelligence, unless there was someone among the political men who could make others political too. If there were, he would be pretty much the only one among the living of the sort Homer said Teiresias was among the dead, saying of him, "Of those in the land of Hades, he alone is wise; the others flit around as shadows."[5] In the same way, in this world also, with respect to virtue, such a man would be a real thing compared to shadows, as it were.

[100b] **M:** I think you put it superbly, Socrates.

So: Based on this reasoning, then, Meno, it seems to us that virtue is present to those who have it by a share of the divine. We will have clear knowledge of it when, before we ask in what way virtue comes to be in man, we first try to discover what exactly virtue is in its own right.

But now it is time for me to go somewhere. As for you, on the other hand, persuade your guest-friend here, Anutos, of the very things you have been convinced [100c] of, so that he might become gentler. If you persuade him, you will also benefit the Athenians.

[5] *Homer. Odyssey* 10.494-5.